

According to the Promise – 2 Pet 3:1-13

The Gospel Age of Hope - #6

Introduction – At first glance, it appears as if Peter expects God to put all the “stuff” of creation into his big oven and then melt it all away (v12). In addition, one often missed notion is that Peter is telling his contemporary audience that they should be “*looking for and hastening*” this day. Many believe that the NT authors were wrong in expecting Jesus to return in their generation. You might think that Peter is talking about the Final Advent of Jesus Christ and that he is describing an event future to us; the end of this world. But in this gospel age of hope, there is another interpretation that doesn’t leave us wondering if Peter was mixed up when he had heard the promises of Jesus.

According To His Promise (vv1-9) – Peter’s audience is tempted to fall into thinking that God is not keeping His promise, or that the false teachers are correct in denouncing any imminent judgment upon the Old Covenant Order.

Writing to You (vv1-2) – Peter is writing his second epistle to the same audience as his first, the Jewish believers scattered outside of Israel, many due to the persecutions upon them by the Jews (Acts). He wishes to stir them up, reminding them of what they already have been taught “*by the holy prophets, and....the apostles.*” What he is going to talk about has already been taught to them.

Scoffers (vv3-4) – Nearly a generation has passed since Jesus’ ascension and the false teachers he refers to are scoffing “*in the last days*” that Peter’s audience is living through. The “promise of His coming” is being laughed at because the patriarchs of the church (many of them) had died and everything was continuing as it was. Keep this in mind: the promise refers to an event the fathers had taught would come in the generation Peter was addressing, and hadn’t yet come.

They Willfully Forget (vv5-7) – These mockers forget what they know: in Noah’s day there were similar mockers at Noah’s message. And then the judgment came just as promised. Similarly, the “*heavens and the earth which are now (presently) preserved by the same Word, are reserved for fire...*” In other words, Peter is telling them not to worry: the God of Promise has a reservation set for a particular day and He has promised it will come in this generation (the generation to whom Peter is writing). This has been an historic interpretation, although not currently popular. John Owen (17th century Puritan) maintained that the “*passing of heaven and earth*” had reference, “*not to the last and final judgment of the world, but to that utter desolation and destruction that was to be made of the Judaical church and state*” in 70AD.

The Lord is Not Slack (vv8-9) – The Lord cannot be delayed by events-in-time. When He tarries, it is for His own purposes. And Peter explains that His purposes, as is so often the case, is to be “*longsuffering towards us*” (the Jewish people in particular who stand in the specific coming judgment) so that more would come to repentance. This is the reason God did not immediately judge Israel for crucifying His Son.

The Day of the Lord (vv10-13) – Peter is not changing the topic but rather reasserting what God had promised (v13). He is exhorting his readers to “*holy conduct and godliness*” (v11) and to be “*looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God...*” (v12). Therefore what Peter is describing in these verses must have taken place in their day or else Peter was wrong. This is where we must be good Bible students.

Heavens and Earth – Throughout the Old Testament, language of *heavens and earth*, its establishment, or judgment upon it, referred to political/covenantal orders. So Isaiah describes the planting of heavens and earth as a description of the Mosaic Covenant, the Exodus and giving of the law on Zion (Isaiah 51:15-16). Isaiah describes the destruction of the state of Edom in language of a collapsing universe (Isaiah 34:1-5). These are just a few of many examples.

Elements/Stoicheia – Melting elements should not be interpreted as, for instance, a nuclear holocaust. Every time *stoicheia* is used in the NT it is referring to the Old Covenant order or to a similar pagan description of the four elementary gods, earth, air, wind and fire (Gal 4:3, 9-10, Col 2:8, 20-21, Heb 5:12). Peter, using prophetic, biblical language, is describing the end of the Old Covenant order through fiery judgment.

The Promise of the New Heavens and the New Earth (v13) – This is why he can promise his readers to expect and look for a new heavens and a new earth. Where is this promise?

Isaiah 65-66 – Isaiah ends his prophecies with these chapters speaking of the reprobate Israelites who would be rejected (65:1-2). He promises to call His elect by another name (vv13-16) and then announces this new heavens and new earth (v17) which cannot possibly be the eternal state for it contains birth and death, building and planting (vv20-23). 66:1-2 describe the new heavens/earth as well, declaring that there will no longer be a local place that will be God’s house, for as we are told in the New Covenant, we are the new temple (1 Cor 3:16, 6:19), we are the living stones (1 Pet 2:4-5), we are the new Jerusalem (Rev 21:2, 9). Finally, 66:22-23 uses this term, “*the new heavens and the new earth*” comprising the the age of the Gospel’s triumph, when “*all flesh shall come to worship before Me.*”

Rom 10:17-21 – Finally, in this passage where Paul is defending his ministry to the Gentiles, he quotes Isaiah 65:1-2, showing these verses were being fulfilled in his day.

The Gospel Age of Hope – Peter was promising what Christ had promised and what the prophets had taught. Jesus Christ ushered in the new heavens and the new earth in the destruction of the Old Covenant order and His judgment upon unbelieving Israel. But in this we still see the longsuffering character of God towards rebellious people – and we pray for the saving knowledge of Him to yet fill the earth as the waters cover the sea.